Boston Massacre notes

What is the Boston Massacre? -

“The Boston Massacre was the killing of five colonists by British regulars on March 5, 1770. It was the culmination of tensions in the American colonies that had been growing since Royal troops first appeared in Massachusetts in October 1768 to enforce the heavy tax burden imposed by the Townshend Acts.” (<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/>)

**Historic Timeline** (<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/>)

“It took only few hours for the tragic events to unfold on the evening in March of 1770, starting from a confrontation with the British regulars and ending with the death of five colonists. It took several years to get to the situation. The Boston Massacre is best understood in the context of several other key historic events.

### June 29, 1767 – the British Parliament Passes the Townshend Acts

The heavy presence of British troops in Boston that lead to the fatal shooting was the direct results of the Townshend Acts passed by British Parliament to impose additional taxes on common products imported into the Colonies. These products among others included paper, glass and tea.

### October 1, 1768 - British Troops Start Arriving to Boston

On October 1, 1768 a group of British regulars arrived in Boston, MA to maintain order. The civilians reacted to the redcoats like they were invaders by taunting them through name calling, spitting, and fighting. The people of Boston had gained control of the reigns of power and prevented the soldiers from carrying out their duties. During the next eighteen months tension mounted between the two sides.

### March 5, 1770 - The Boston Massacre Occurs

On March 5, 1770 the Twenty-Ninth Regiment came to the relief of the Eighth on duty at the Customs House on King (now State) Street. The soldiers, led by [Captain Thomas Preston](http://www.bostonmassacre.net/players/preston-biography.htm), were met by a large and taunting crowd of civilians. Captain Preston was unable to disperse the crowd and as they chanted "Fire and be damned" he ordered his troops "Don't Fire!" With all the commotion the soldiers probably did not hear his orders and they opened fire on the crowd killing three men instantly and another two who died later.

### October 24-30, 1770 - The Trial of Captain Preston

Seven months later, in October of 1770, Captain Preston was tried for murder in a Boston courtroom. He was defended by John Adams and Robert Auchmuty and assisted by Josiah Quincy Jr. Captain Preston was acquitted by a Boston jury. It was never satisfactory explained why the radicals Adams and Quincy represented Preston, and later the soldiers, although some surviving documents suggest that the jury in Preston's case was "packed." When the soldiers case came to trial soon after they were defended by Adams, Quincy, and Sampson Salter Blowers. The jurors in their case came from outside of Boston and they won acquittals a month after the trial began.

### November 27 - Dec 14, 1770 - the Trial of the British Soldiers

# The eight British soldiers accused of murder were tried separately from their officer Captain Preston. But just like the Preston’s trial the proceedings were delayed by 8 months after the incident to allow emotions to cool down. As a result of the trial, six soldiers were acquitted on the grounds of self-defense, but two were found guilty of murder because of the overpowering proof that they fired into the crowd.

# The Boston Massacre Trial Jury(<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/>)

Interestingly enough, the jury assembled in the Boston Massacre trial did not have a single person from Boston. This was done on purpose as a measure to ensure a fair trial of the British. The trial was also delayed by several months to let the emotions cool down after the shooting. Both British authorities and the patriots were interested in fair proceedings, and basically for the same reason. The British were concerned that if the public would decide that the perpetrators were left off the hook, such situation could drive public towards the independence radicals. The patriots were also trying to avoid the situation that unfair conviction could negatively resonate among moderates and increase support for the British side. They were also afraid of a possible retaliation.

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| **The Results of the Trial**(<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/>)  The Massacre trials ended quietly. Samuel Adams wrote several articles in the Boston Gazette during December, 1770, under the pseudonym "Vindex," that accused the soldiers of escaping with blood on their hands. But the mood had changed in Boston since the Massacre. He turned his attentions to keeping the memory of the Massacre alive, organizing annual commemorations on March 5, a tradition that lasted until 1783.  Kilroy and Montgomery faced the death penalty at the sentencing on December 14, 1770. To escape execution they "prayed the benefit of clergy," a Medieval remnant of the time when clergymen were excepted from the secular courts. To receive the benefit they had only to prove they could read Psalm 51, verse 1, the "neck verse," at a time when most people were illiterate. Although illiterate himself, Kilroy was able to obtain the benefit because the reading requirement was abolished in 1705.  Suffolk County Sheriff Stephen Greenleaf branded Kilroy and Montgomery on the right thumb with an "M" for murder. The brand was to prevent them from ever being able to invoke the benefit of clergy again.  After his acquittal, Captain Preston removed himself from Boston to Castle William in Boston Harbor, and eventually returned to England. The soldiers returned to the Twenty-ninth Regiment, which had left Boston following the Massacre.  (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston_Massacre>) Background British troops were sent to Boston in 1768 to help officials enforce the [Townshend Acts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Townshend_Acts), a series of laws passed by the [British Parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_Great_Britain). The purpose of the Townshend program was to make colonial governors and judges independent of colonial control, to create a more effective means of enforcing compliance with trade regulations, and to establish the controversial precedent that Parliament had the right to tax the colonies. [[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston_Massacre#cite_note-The_Townshend_Acts-3)  Colonists objected that the Townshend Acts were a violation of the [natural](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_and_legal_rights), [charter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charter_colony), and [constitutional](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Constitution) [rights of British subjects](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rights_of_Englishmen) in the colonies. Boston was a center of the resistance.  The Townshend Acts were so unpopular in Boston that customs officials requested naval and military assistance.  Impact  The Boston Massacre is one of most important events that turned colonial sentiment against King George III and British acts and taxes. Each of these events followed a pattern of Britain asserting its control, and the colonists chafing under the increased regulation. Events such as the [Tea Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tea_Act) and the ensuing [Boston Tea Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston_Tea_Party) were further examples of the crumbling relationship between Britain and the colonies. While it took five years from the Massacre to outright revolution, it foreshadowed the violent rebellion to come. It also demonstrated how British authority galvanized colonial opposition and protest. |  |